



Morning Alert - Friday, August 4, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK led with a report on powerful Typhoon Noru that is likely to hit Amami Oshima Island off Kagoshima this afternoon. Most commercial broadcasters gave prominent top coverage to a large fire that broke out yesterday near the Tsukiji Fish Market in Tokyo.

All national dailies other than Nikkei gave top play to the launch of the new Abe cabinet. Nikkei led with a report on Toyota's plan to form a capital alliance with Mazda to pave the way for a joint-venture auto plant in the U.S. and joint development of key electric vehicle technologies.

POLITICS

Abe launches new cabinet

All papers ran front-page reports on a news conference held by Prime Minister Abe after reshuffling his cabinet and key LDP posts on Thursday. At the beginning of the news conference, Abe apologized for his "poor" handling of the scandals involving Kake Gakuen and Moritomo Gakuen, pledging that he will make utmost efforts to fulfill the mandate of the Japanese people. The premier also expressed his plan to give priority to economic revitalization, characterizing the new cabinet as a group of "professionals." The papers wrote that Abe tapped veterans and politicians who are experienced in policymaking to achieve stability in the administration following the gaffes and other problems caused by previous cabinet members.

Quoting the premier as saying that the debate on constitutional revision should not be conducted according to a schedule, the papers wrote that Abe is now being more flexible about his plan to submit amendments to the Diet this fall for enactment in 2020. Asahi speculated that Abe has changed tack out of concern that his political base would weaken further if he went ahead with his plan without listening to the opinions of opponents within the LDP. The premier is apparently

determined to prevent cabinet support from dropping further even if he has to change course on his signature project. However, the paper also conjectured that the shift may draw criticism from his conservative supporters.

Nikkei wrote that there are a number of domestic and diplomatic issues for the new Abe cabinet to deal with, including establishing sound relations with the Trump administration, improving ties with China, and responding to North Korea's provocations.

Yomiuri wrote that although Abe is hoping that the cabinet reshuffle will help him regain public support, it may be difficult for him to win a third term in the LDP presidential election in September 2018 if cabinet support continues to decline. Seiko Noda, who was appointed as internal affairs minister, told reporters on Thursday that she will definitely run in the next LDP leadership race.

DP's Hosono indicates departure from party

All papers wrote that former Democratic Party Vice President Goshi Hosono has told his fellow politicians that he plans to leave the party. The papers speculated that Hosono is considering allying with the Tomin First party, which is effectively led by Tokyo Governor Koike.

INTERNATIONAL

Ability of new foreign minister to be tested soon

Asahi wrote that the ability of Foreign Minister Taro Kono will be tested when he attends ASEAN-related foreign ministerial meetings to be held in Manila starting on Aug. 6. He is expected to hold talks with his U.S. and ROK counterparts to discuss North Korea's continued provocations. The paper wrote that Kono is expected to strive to strengthen the relationship of trust with the U.S. ahead of the APEC ministerial and the envisaged visit to Japan by President Trump in November.

Kono is the son of former Foreign Minister and Lower House Speaker Yohei Kono, who has close ties with China and issued as chief cabinet secretary in 1993 the so-called Kono statement acknowledging the involvement of the Japanese military in the forceful recruitment of comfort women. When asked about his views on the Japan-ROK comfort women agreement at a news conference on Thursday, the new foreign minister stated that Japan's position on the comfort women issue is based on Prime Minister Abe's statement on the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII and the 2015 Japan-ROK agreement. China and South Korea welcomed the appointment of Kono as foreign minister in the hope that their relations with Japan will improve under his diplomatic leadership, with Sankei saying that South Korean Foreign Minister Kang asked Japanese Ambassador to Seoul Nagamine on Thursday to convey a congratulatory message to Kono.

U.S., Japanese, ROK national security advisors discuss North Korea

Asahi and Sankei wrote that the national security advisors of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea held their first three-way teleconference for about an hour on Thursday and agreed to ratchet up the

pressure on North Korea following its test launch of an ICBM on July 28. National Security Advisor McMaster and his Japanese and ROK counterparts Yachi and Chung participated in the teleconference.

Secretary Tillerson not planning to meet with DPRK counterpart at ASEAN meeting

Thursday evening's Nikkei wrote that Acting Assistant Secretary of State Thornton said in a teleconference with reporters on Wednesday that Secretary of State Tillerson has no plans to hold talks with North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho on the sidelines of a regional security forum slated for Aug. 7 in Manila. Tokyo Shimbun also reported on remarks by Thornton, quoting her as saying that Washington is consulting with other nations on the suspension of North Korea's membership in the ASEAN Regional Forum. The U.S. official reportedly added that the DPRK's actions have violated the conflict-prevention aims of the ARF and that the U.S. expects that there will be a general chorus of condemnation of North Korea's provocative behavior at the conference.

U.S. issues travel restriction for North Korea

Thursday evening's Yomiuri wrote that the USG announced on Wednesday that it will restrict the use of U.S. passports for travel to North Korea. The use of U.S. passports to travel to the DPRK will be restricted to humanitarian assistance and other special purposes, effective Sept. 1. The USG took the action in response to the death of Otto Warmbier, an American college student who died just days after Pyongyang released him from prison. The Department of State decided to take the action based on the judgment that there is a serious and mounting risk of arrest and long-term detention of U.S. citizens by North Korea.

SECURITY

Abe instructs new defense chief to review National Defense Program Guidelines

All papers wrote that Defense Minister Onodera told a news conference on Thursday that Prime Minister Abe has instructed him to review the existing National Defense Program Guidelines that were compiled in December 2013 to determine Japan's defense plans for ten years starting in 2014. Onodera stated that the move is aimed at adjusting Japan's defense policy to respond to the increasingly severe security environment.

Antiterrorism training conducted in Tokyo

NHK's metropolitan news program reported last night on an anti-terror drill carried out by the Japanese police at the New Sanno Hotel in Minato Ward, Tokyo, noting that the training was based on a scenario in which armed terrorists rammed a hijacked bus into the U.S.-military hotel. Footage showed Japanese riot police restraining mock terrorists and the use of special equipment to defuse an explosive device. Azabu Police Station Director Oumi said: "It was an extremely useful session for ensuring coordination with the U.S. military."

ECONOMY

Aso hopes to hold economic dialogue with U.S. in October

Thursday evening's Nikkei wrote that Finance Minister Aso told the press that he would like to hold the next session of the U.S.-Japan Economic Dialogue in October. If convened, this will be the second meeting since the two nations held the first session in Tokyo in April. Aso indicated the possibility of prior consultations with Vice President Pence in September.

